

# PAUL, WHERE DID YOU GET THIS GOSPEL?<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In his ground-breaking study of Galatians H. D. Betz analyzed Paul's message in terms of forensic rhetoric, labeling 1:12–2:14 as *narratio*, 2:15-21 *propositio*, and 3:1–4:31 as *probatio*.<sup>2</sup> Although many question his methodology, the relative strategy and weight of argumentation that he assigned to the various parts reflect the majority understanding of the book. That is, Paul defends his apostleship in 1:12–2:14, which is seen as only preparatory to the articulation of his main point in 2:15-21, which then builds to the climax of his argumentation, which is the weighty, theological proof, found in 3:1–4:31. This “apologetic” approach finds support in Paul's initial summary statement of 1:11-12, and the historical narrative of chapter one, but eventually fails to account for all of Paul's argument<sup>3</sup> especially in light of his ambivalence in chapter two where he submits his gospel to the pillars for their approval.<sup>4</sup>

As Barclay notes, “recent research has rightly questioned whether Paul's purposes here are primarily apologetic” preferring a more paradigmatic model of understanding for 1:11–2:14.<sup>5</sup> In recounting his personal experience Paul is not so much playing defense as offense. The events of this section are not simply Paul's personal story, but God's story of how he will work in the lives of the Galatians as well. As Schütz has stated, “the thread of narrative continuity in Galatians 1–2 is not Paul as such (his experiences and crises) but Paul's story insofar as it represents the experiences and crises of the gospel.”<sup>6</sup> This view is more satisfying because it sees Paul getting to

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<sup>2</sup>H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup>“It is clear enough that in Galatians itself Paul is striving to assert his independence from Jerusalem - that is hardly to be disputed. But that explanation has always left a number of puzzling loose ends. It is certainly a necessary explanation but has proved insufficient in itself to explain *all* that Paul says” (emphasis mine), J. D. G. Dunn, “The Relationship between Paul and Jerusalem according to Galatians 1 and 2,” *New Testament Studies* 28:4 (1982), 461.

<sup>4</sup>D. F. Tolmie candidly states, “the fact that this admission seems to ‘slip out’ is a weak point in his persuasive strategy and a perfect illustration of the pressing rhetorical situation in which he finds himself, namely that the acceptance of Jerusalem's authority is a given reality which he must accept,” *Persuading the Galatians*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 190 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 77.

<sup>5</sup>John M. G. Barclay, “Paul's Story: Theology as Testimony,” in *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment*, edited by Bruce W. Longenecker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 137. See also B. R. Gaventa, “Galatians 1 and 2 : Autobiography as Paradigm,” *Novum Testamentum* 28 (1986): 309-26.

<sup>6</sup>J. H. Schütz, *Paul and Apostolic Authority* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 128ff .

more significant points of the argument earlier, and because many textual allusions and similarities between Paul's situation and those of his audience do undoubtedly exist. The Galatians and Paul have been called by God (1:6, 15), both are dependent upon God's gracious initiative (1:6, 15), both must choose between Judaism and Christ (5:2, 4; 1:13-14), and both are being encouraged or trapped into slavery rather than freedom (5:1; 2:4)<sup>7</sup>

While this approach explains portions of the text that the apologetic approach could not, and Paul's choices and life change do serve as an example for his audience, neither view can fully account for the unusual focus on geography, chronology, and the unfolding nature of the message of the gospel. In chapter one at least, the story is not so much about a *transformed* Paul as much as a *traveling* Paul and in chapter two the ultimate test case of the gospel is not Paul's own story, but that of Titus. The text is simply too rich to be explained merely apologetically or even paradigmatically.

### An Alternative View

#### Thesis of the study

As others have noted 1:11-12 does serve as an introductory statement standing at the head of 1:11–2:21, which alerts the reader to the direction of Paul's narrative message. It is in fact, not the story of Paul *per se*, but rather of his gospel and of its uniqueness.<sup>8</sup> The reasoning usually proceeds along the lines of a defense of the divine, rather than the human, origin of Paul's gospel. His argumentation is interpreted as an effort to deny that he got the gospel from any man. This argument, however, cuts two ways, and one of those ways has been under-appreciated. That is, he did not get the gospel from any man, but neither would any other man have gotten this gospel except from him!

When chapters one and two are carefully compared from this perspective an interesting contrast and development appears. In chapter one a quiet obscurity surrounds Paul's gospel, while in chapter two a bolder clarity arises. In this scheme the geographical references work along with the many chronological markers to paint a slightly fuller picture of the unfolding nature of the content of Paul's gospel, explaining why Paul's gospel seems to be such a

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<sup>7</sup>See Gaventa, "Galatians 1 and 2," 317-19 for more examples.

<sup>8</sup>Note that the gospel rather than Paul's life is the semantic subject of the section (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθὲν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ). Accordingly Paul argues that the gospel is more important than any human being, even himself when he says "If I or anyone else preach a different gospel let him be accursed" (1:8).

recent development, and more importantly, why so many people have such a hard time coming to terms with it.<sup>9</sup>

#### Parameters of the Study

Because we are working at the macro-level of meaning this study must be content to make certain assumptions about the place of Galatians in the ministry of Paul, and the relationship between the chronology and events of Acts and Galatians. We have assumed for the sake of argument that the South Galatian theory best explains the identity of the recipients of the letter as those churches established by Paul on his first missionary journey and that Paul wrote the letter shortly after the return from that journey in approximately AD 49, before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.<sup>10</sup> Further, though Luke has written his own theological history of the period in the book of Acts, we assume that Acts is a trustworthy history, which ultimately harmonizes with Galatians.<sup>11</sup> We have assumed that Paul's trip to Arabia (Galatians 1) should be placed in Acts 9 before his return to Jerusalem and that the famine relief visit of Acts 11 is the same visit as that recorded in Galatians 2:1-10, which is a separate event from the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15.

Ultimately the thesis of this paper must be judged not so much on the individual assumptions which must be made in the course of the argument, but on its explanatory power as a whole to bring coherence to the message of Galatians 1-2, and its faithfulness to the historical, cultural and theological dimensions of the early church as revealed in Acts.

#### Paul's Argument in Galatians 1

##### Geography

To follow Paul's movements in the first chapter, one must have a working knowledge of the geography of the Mediterranean world. Throughout the discussion in which Paul names a multitude of places he

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<sup>9</sup>A number of persons could be named: 1) the chief of which, is Peter (2:11-14), 2) the "men from James" (2:12), 3) Paul's opponents in Galatia, 4) the "false brethren" (2:4-5), and 5) the brothers in Judea (1:21-24).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977)

<sup>11</sup>"It is not at all inappropriate to take seriously Luke's account of Paul's itinerary in attempting to unravel the problems posed by Gal 1-2," Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), lxxviii. As Longenecker aptly warns, "Because the letter deals with such important matters as the salvation of Gentiles apart from the Jewish law and relationships between Paul and the Jerusalem church, one's view as to date has wide-ranging implications for one's understanding of Paul's theology and the reconstruction of the history of early Christianity" *ibid*, lxxiii. For a clear explanation of the major views of the chronological harmonization between Galatians and Acts see lxxiii-lxxxiii.

visited what he really seems bent on emphasizing is what little time he actually spent in the Jerusalem environs. The first emphasis of this comes in the climactic section and complex sentence of 1:15-17. In typical Pauline fashion the sentence structure is complex beginning with several introductory clauses, not getting to the main verb until near the end of v.16 (εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι). While the semantic and significant subject of the sentence would appear to be God's sovereign call of Paul and his consequent mission to Gentiles, Paul's grammar places the emphasis elsewhere. The main verb and its attendant phrases with their hypotactic relationships<sup>12</sup> focus the attention on what Paul did *not* do with the new knowledge of his commission ("I did not *immediately consult* with flesh and blood, *nor* go up to Jerusalem, *but* went to Arabia," 1:16).<sup>13</sup> Specifically, he did not take the information to Jerusalem, but went away into Arabia. Much speculation about what Paul did or did not do in Arabia exists, but the point of the grammar is at least that it was not into Jerusalem or its environs through which he initially journeyed.

Later, Paul does travel to Jerusalem (1:18), but it seems to be a very short visit compared with the time he spent in Arabia. Afterwards, he departed again for Syria and Cilicia (1:21), which, like Arabia, seem to be somewhere, almost anywhere, other than Jerusalem. This explains the fact that the churches of Judea neither knew him by face nor heard anything other than the most basic message of Paul's ministry (1:22-23). Paul's point here then is certainly that he spent very little time Jerusalem, but perhaps more importantly, and what we often miss, is that they knew even less about him!

### Chronology

No where else in Paul's epistles is he nearly as concerned to give a strict chronological accounting of his life. Almost half of his argumentation<sup>14</sup> in the first chapter is given to this and even here the focus is upon not the time before his conversion or call, but rather what happened to him afterwards. The chronological marker begins with his call (ὅτε δὲ, 1:15) moves to what he did not immediately do (εὐθέως 1:15), and then follows with a string of the same adverb used three times denoting a definite chronological succession (ἔπειτα, 1:18, 21; 2:1). Martyn

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<sup>12</sup>“This sentence structure emphasises the main verbal clause, because the first part of the sentence (ὅτε δὲ) alerts the audience to the fact that the main idea is still outstanding, and they will therefore have to ‘wait’ until it is finally mentioned. Accordingly, the focus of attention is shifted to the idea in the main verbal clause, namely εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι,” Tolmie, *Persuading the Galatians*, 60.

<sup>13</sup>εὐθέως οὐ προσανεθέμην σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι οὐδὲ ἀνλθον εἰς εροσόλυμα πρὸς τοὺς πρὸ ἔμο ἀποστόλους ἀλλὰ ἀπλθον εἰς ἀραβίαν καὶ πάλιν ὑπέστρεψα εἰς Δαμασκόν.

<sup>14</sup>Ten out of twenty-two lines in the Greek text are dedicated to this argument.

analyzes the significance of the syntax:

In this sentence Paul is clearly taking his call as the point from which chronological measurement is to be made, and he is using the adverb εὐθέως: ‘*immediately* after that [my call], I kept to myself . . . ; nor did I make a trip to Jerusalem . . .’ In this sentence Paul is clearly taking his call as the point from which chronological measurement is to be made, and he is using the adverb εὐθέως to indicate the temporal measurement between his call and a trip to Jerusalem. He says, that is, that *immediately* after his call he kept to himself, not going to the Jerusalem church. It is highly probable, then, that he uses the adverbial expression in v 18 – ‘then, after three years’ – in the same way, indicating the length of time between his call and his actually making a trip to Jerusalem. One may paraphrase the two references to a Jerusalem trip as follows:

16. *Immediately after* my call, I kept to myself. 17. I did not make a trip up to Jerusalem to see those who were already apostles before I became one. 18. Then, not having gone up to Jerusalem immediately after my call, *when about three years had passed since that event*, I did go up to Jerusalem in order to visit Cephas. And the same intention seems to be expressed in 2:1:

Then, *about fourteen years after my call*, I went up to Jerusalem again, accompanied by Barnabas . . .<sup>15</sup>

The critical point of this literary observation is not simply that it distinguishes between consecutive and comprehensive dating schemes, but rather that it semantically connects the call with the two trips to Jerusalem and the intervening trip to Syria. Specifically, what did not happen immediately at the call (εὐθέως, 1:16), then again did not happen three years later (ἔπειτα, 1:18), and then did not happen in Syria (ἔπειτα, 1:21), and then finally did happen after fourteen years (ἔπειτα, 2:1).<sup>16</sup>

In the midst of the main markers he gives other time indications that note obvious comparisons. That is, the three years in Arabia are considerably more time than the very short stay of fifteen days that Paul enjoys with Peter. It is in this context that Paul chooses to offer his most profound oath of the section, “I assure you before God I am not lying” (1:20). According to traditional interpretations of the chapter one would expect that Paul would save his persuasion by oath for a more significant point such as the nature of his message or the christophany on the Damascus road, but, again, he places it on the chronology of events. One can only assume that unless the reader accepts Paul’s account of his movements his most important persuasive point in the chapter will be lost.

Finally, it seems that Paul takes great pains in his argument to account for every significant move so that his argument depends not so much on what has happened as upon what has not happened. Only when arguing for what

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<sup>15</sup>J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1997), 181-82.

<sup>16</sup>“The adverb ἔπειτα, ‘then’ appears frequently in Koine Greek . . . and is often contrasted with πρώτον, ‘first’. . . Here it is contrasted with εὐθέως, ‘immediately thereafter,’ . . .” p. 37. “So in the narrative of 1:18–2:10 he uses ἔπειτα to assure his readers that there are no gaps in his account.” Longenecker, *Galatians*, 36. This assumes that the three years and fourteen years are concurrent, not consecutive and are both measured from Paul’s initial call.

has *not* happened does one need to account for every possible block of time.

### Content of his Message

As noted before, the focus of chapter one is not necessarily the life of Paul, but rather the story of his gospel (1:11-12). While we look in hindsight on the events of chapter one it may be tempting to fill in Paul's thoughts with what we now know to be the case, but in order to understand Paul's message it is important to allow the text to speak for itself. When allowed to do so, the exact content of Paul's gospel is relatively obscure. As the argument opens (1:13-14) the conflict occurs between the non-messianic Jewish Paul and the Jews who follow Messiah.<sup>17</sup> The contrast is clearly between non-messianic Judaism and messianic Judaism, while nothing in the text or in parallel passages of Acts suggests that Gentiles are even in the picture.

The next insight into the nature of Paul's gospel comes when he compares his call to that of Isaiah and Jeremiah describing himself as being set apart from birth and called to the Gentiles<sup>18</sup> and then clearly states that the purpose for his call was to preach him among Gentiles. The reader must keep in mind, however, that just like Paul's original companions on the Damascus road, only Paul actually understood the voice. Although Paul probably knew<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Martyn wonders aloud why a zealous Jew would persecute other Law-observant Jews, answering with "there is a strong hint in Gal 3:13 that Paul viewed the church as Jewish sect that was intent on venerating as though he were God's Messiah a man who had been crucified as a criminal, and who therefore stood under the curse of God's Law. In a word, Paul probably saw in the church's *christology* a truly significant threat to the Law. Thus, however observant the members of this sect might have been in their day-to-day lives, they seem to have represented, in Paul's view, an intolerable cancer in the body of God's elect people" Martyn, *Galatians*, 162. If we can learn from the book of Acts, it would be premature to see Paul's argument with the church here as having anything to do with Gentiles. Since Paul, the apostle of the Gentiles, says that his gospel has its unique origin in God and Paul's conversion (Acts 9) happens before God opens the door to Gentiles through Peter (Acts 10-11), and the very Jewish nature of the Church at this point (Acts 21:20) it would be anachronistic to see Paul's objection to the church as anything other than an objection to Christ (not Gentiles). So also, Tolmie, "His message was not something new or different, but the same gospel held by the churches of Judea before he was called" Tolmie, *Persuading*, 68.

<sup>18</sup>Both Isaiah (49:5-6) and Jeremiah (1:5) speak of being set apart from the womb to proclaim the message to Gentiles. Again, it would be anachronistic to understand the call of these men as preaching a law-free gospel to Gentiles. The common Old Testament understanding was that in the messianic age the Law would go out from Zion (Isa 4) and that Gentiles would ask Jewish people to take them up to the house of the Lord.

<sup>19</sup>Longenecker states, "We need not suppose that Paul immediately grasped all that was either stated or implied in that encounter—i.e., that he fully understood in a moment everything pertaining to 'his Son' or everything pertaining to preaching Christ 'among the Gentiles.' Paul's own letters suggest that his understanding of Christ developed throughout his life as a Christian, and the Acts of the Apostles indicates that there were stages in his comprehension of what a mission to Gentiles involved. In good Semitic fashion, Paul speaks in ultimates without any attention to stages or progression of thought (cf. Acts 26:16-23)" *Galatians*, 32. A comparison between the three accounts of Paul's conversion/call in Acts 9, 22 and 26 is particularly instructive. Luke gives significantly different details in the three re-tellings of the story and seems to slowly and gradually unfold the meaning of Paul's call for the reader, perhaps in a similar way to what Paul is doing in this epistle.

from the beginning what his ultimate call was and he includes it here for the readers' understanding, what is important in the argument of the chapter is what Paul did with this information in those first fourteen years and who did or did not know of it.

When Paul eventually returned to Jerusalem after three years he spent fifteen days with Peter. The two critical factors in this report are clearly the length of time which is defined (especially in the context of the three years spent in Arabia) as a relatively short amount of time and the nature of the visit. Paul clearly is attempting to minimize the significance of the visit by citing its relatively short duration. The second factor, the nature of the visit, is more difficult to interpret with confidence because it depends, in some part, on the meaning of the verb ἵστορέω, a *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament. While much has been written about the word, the semantic range would allow anything from “to visit” or “get acquainted with” to the more specific “get information from.”<sup>20</sup> Since many would see Paul as defending against the charge that the source of his gospel was Jerusalem in general and Peter in particular, they tend to choose the more theologically acceptable “get acquainted with,” or at least argue that the more specific idea of “learn from” would somehow not compromise Paul’s independence from the apostles.<sup>21</sup> But Dunn, arguing more philologically from contemporary literature argues that:

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in our period the thought of ‘gaining information’ is always present in ἵστορήσαι, . . . . The lexical parallels therefore strongly support LSJ’s rendering of ἵστορήσαι Κηφᾶν as ‘visit Peter for the purpose of inquiry’, or G. D. Kilpatrick’s stronger alternative, ‘to get information from Cephas’.<sup>22</sup>

Is it possible that Paul is saying that he learned from Peter, but not necessarily the other way around? Indeed, for Paul to have presented his unique mission to the Gentiles to Peter during this visit would have been fraught with trouble from the start. In the first place, Paul had no credibility as an apostle at this point and even required the

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<sup>20</sup>“ . . . to visit Cephas and get information from him,” *NET Bible*, 2174. Louw & Nida offer the meaning of “to visit, with the purpose of obtaining information,” Johannes P. Louw, and Eugene Nida, eds, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1988), 34.52. Cf. also Dunn, “The Relationship between Paul and Jerusalem according to Galatians 1 and 2,” 461-78.

<sup>21</sup>Tolmie, *Persuading the Galatians*, 65. See also Don Garlington, *An Exposition of Galatians*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 76-77. Witherington, who is not so intent on defending Paul’s apostleship, rightly says, “This conclusion, that Paul sought information, even if only from and in part about Peter himself, runs counter to the notion that Paul was trying to defend himself here against the charge that he was dependent in any way on such Jerusalem church luminaries. The aim in Galatians is not to defend Paul’s apostolic office nor attack anyone else’s apostolicity. . . . nor is he reluctant to acknowledge any debt he may have to them,” Ben Witherington, III, *Grace in Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 120.

<sup>22</sup>Dunn, “The Relationship,” 465.

sponsorship of Barnabas before any of the apostles would trust him. Second, given Peter's complete lack of understanding about any mission to the Gentiles at this point (approximately AD 37, and a few years before his visitation of Cornelius, Acts 10-11) it would strain the imagination for the recently turned outlaw, Paul, to have shared such a paradigm-altering message with Peter who exhibited a loyalty concerning the law such that he thrice refused God's directive in the vision (Acts 10:14).

If on the other hand, the verb can be translated "to learn from Peter" Paul's point may simply be that in the short fifteen day visit it was his privilege to learn from Peter about the story of Jesus firsthand, but that the flow of information was definitely one-sided. This would imply that the first place that Peter heard about God's plan for the Gentiles was from God himself in the Gentile pentecost at Joppa (Acts 10-11) and not from Paul. If then Peter had not heard of this argument and Paul only briefly saw James, then no one of influence in Jerusalem would have known about the unique nature of Paul's mission at this point in time.<sup>23</sup> This would help explain why the visit to Jerusalem with these two men in 2:1-10 had to take place, i.e., because they had not heard directly from Paul before. What adds much weight to this argument is that it is precisely here that Paul takes the oath, promising that he is not lying. If Paul's mission was common knowledge at this point, there would be no way to explain why others had not yet heard, and yet this seems to be the exact point of the next verses. The churches of Judea did *not* know Paul by face and they only heard that he who once persecuted was now proclaiming the good news (1:22-23). Paul uses the same words at the end of this section that he used in the beginning, describing Paul's relationship to the church as "persecuting" (διώκων) and attempting to "destroy" (ἐπόρθει), forming an inclusio with 1:13.<sup>24</sup> He carefully qualifies the knowledge of the Judean churches stating that "the *only* thing they heard" was that the persecutor was now a proclaimer. To those of Judea, this would have implied nothing of a Gentile mission, but *only* that the Paul who was

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<sup>23</sup>Indeed, if we can discern from Paul's activities in preaching up to this point (both in Damascus and in Jerusalem) something about the focus of his life, it would appear that he was only preaching the good news to Jewish people and the central message was that "Jesus is the Christ" (Acts 9:20-22, 28). In addition, Luke's retelling of Paul's testimony of these fifteen days in Acts 22 would indicate that only at the very end of this time did God specifically recommission or reconfirm his mission to go to the Gentiles, "'Hurry and get out of Jerusalem quickly because they will not accept your testimony about me. . . . 'Go because I will send you far away to the Gentiles'" (22:18, 21). Perhaps this explains why the short fifteen day visit was so short!

<sup>24</sup>Notice also the repetition of ἐκκλησία in 1:13 and 1:22 and ἀκούειν in 1:13 and 1:23.



against Christ (1:13) was now for him (1:23).<sup>25</sup> What is more telling is that this truth alone cannot account for the sum total of Paul's gospel, because there is nothing unique about this message that could not have been passed on through men. What can *only* be accounted for through a direct revelation from God is the component of Paul's gospel that is revealed in chapter two.

#### Paul's Argument in Galatians 2

Whatever was not known of Paul or of his gospel in the first chapter comes to full revelation with the stories of Titus and Peter (2:1-14). The obscurity and vagueness of chapter one give way to clarity and definition in chapter two. The stark contrast can be seen by looking carefully at the nature of the meeting and the content of the gospel.

##### Nature of the meeting

Paul mentions early in the story that the impetus for the meeting in the first place was a revelation from God. When Paul first made his introductory and summary statement about the uniqueness of his gospel in chapter one he declared that God alone revealed it to him (ἀποκαλύψεως, 1:12). Again, when the call actually came he described it in terms of God revealing (ἀποκαλύψει) Christ in him (1:16). Once again, at this critical juncture in chapter two, the final and full revealing of Paul's gospel is initiated by a revelation (ἀποκάλυψιν) from God (2:2). God first revealed the gospel to Paul, and in Paul and now, for the first time in this record, through Paul to others. This all happens not at the request of men, but at the revelation from God. God sovereignly revealed the message to Paul and sovereignly controls how and when Paul passes it on.<sup>26</sup>

A second feature of this meeting was that it was private (2:2). Whether the meeting was private or public would hardly help Paul's case if his point is to defend the independence of his apostleship and teaching. Indeed his statement that he feared he had run in vain also runs counter to any alleged arguments of independence from the apostles. But the fact that the meeting actually excluded all others would go a long way to explain why no one else

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<sup>25</sup>“His message was not something new or different, but the same gospel held by the churches of Judea before he was called” Tolmie, p. 68. Betz also describes these Judean believers, “Religiously, they were Jewish-Christian and faithful observers of the Torah” and “Paul does not say that at that early time he preached the gospel free from the Law. If he had done this, the Judean Christians would hardly have approved of it,” Betz, *Galatians*, 80 note 231. So also Martyn, *Galatians*, 167, and E. D. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921), 45-46.

<sup>26</sup>Martyn argues that “Paul's narrative of *his own* activities is punctuated by references to *God's activity*. . . . In the Persian period a literary genre emerged that was new to Israel, *revelatory history* in the form of a *personal memoir*. . . . Far from being basically concerned to formulate a judicial defense before a panel of judges competent to decide the issue, Paul is intent on supplying the Galatians' fundamental need, that of being once again swept off their feet by the gospel, the word that lies beyond the criteria of human judgment,” Martyn, *Galatians*, 160-61.

was privy to the information revealed in the meeting.

Finally, when Paul describes the purpose of the visit he may be drawing together linguistically much of his argument.<sup>27</sup> He says he presented (ἀνεθέμην)<sup>28</sup> the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles to the pillars (2:2). After the matter has been decided Paul says that the pillars added nothing (προσανεθέντο) to his gospel or did not “submit anything to my consideration or judgment” (2:6).<sup>29</sup> Προσανατίθημι is only used twice in the New Testament, here in 2:6 and in 1:16 wherein he did not immediately “consult in order to be given a skilled or authoritative interpretation”<sup>30</sup> Thus, to bring the argument full circle, what Paul did not do immediately, (εὐθὺς, 1:16) in chapter 1, in laying his gospel out clearly before men for their scrutiny or interpretation, he now does, with the result that he is fully, and relatively lately (14 years later), approved by a select leadership in Jerusalem. Although we cannot be sure what happened in Paul’s fifteen day visit with Peter based simply on the lexical data of 1:18 alone, when we piece the first two chapters together (especially syntactically) Paul may well be saying that what he did not do immediately (εὐθὺς προσανέθεμην, 1:16), he also did not do after three years (ἔπειτα ἱστορήσαι, 1:18), nor later (1:21) but has only done fourteen years later (ἔπειτα, ἀνεθέμην 2:1-2), and even then in a private rather than a public way (2:2), resulting in nothing being added to him (προσανεθέντο).

1:16 he did not lay it out for interpretation immediately (εὐθὺς προσανέθεμην)

1:18 he did not tell Peter (ἔπειτα ἱστορήσαι)

1:21 he did not tell the brothers in Judea (ἔπειτα)

2:2 but he did tell the Pillars in a private way (ἔπειτα, ἀνεθέμην)

2:6 so that nothing was added to the message (προσανεθέντο)

### Content of the Gospel

The clear nature of the uniqueness of Paul’s gospel finally comes to light in this section. Although the purpose of Paul’s call to preach Christ among the Gentiles was known to him from the Damascus road, no actual

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<sup>27</sup>Indeed, this is not just the linguistic summary or climax, but also the chronological climax as well, with ἔπειτα signaling the third and final sequence of his narrative. “The adverb ἔπειτα (‘then,’ ‘next’) stands over all that Paul recounts in 2:1–10, identifying this as the third enumerated event following his time at Damascus (cf. 1:18ff. and 1:21ff. for the first two) and assuring his readers that there are no gaps in his narrative” Longenecker, *Galatians*, 44.

<sup>28</sup>“To expound with the request for counsel, approval or decision” J. Behm, “ἀνατίθημι,” *TDNT* 1:353. “lay something before someone for consideration,” *BDAG*, 74.

<sup>29</sup>Behm, *TDNT* 1:353.

<sup>30</sup>Dunn argues convincingly from a study of contemporary usage that “A technical sense for προσανεθέμην therefore becomes quite probable - ‘consult in order to be given a skilled or authoritative interpretation,’” Dunn, “The Relationship,” 462-463.

reference to Gentiles occurs in the first chapter except in his initial commission. In chapter two, however, his gospel is repeatedly defined as a law-free Gentile mission. What is under scrutiny, of course, is neither Paul's life nor his apostleship but rather "the gospel that I preach among Gentiles" (2:2) and the test case for the discussion is appropriately an adult male Gentile—Titus.<sup>31</sup>

Without even describing the various sides in the case or reciting any of the deliberations that happened during the meeting Paul quickly blurts out the final judgment of the event, "but neither Titus who was with me was compelled to be circumcised" (2:3) revealing that the crux of the issue was a law-free Gentile mission. Paul reports that they did not give in to the pressure to circumcise Titus so that "the truth of the gospel" would remain, again associating with, or even defining his gospel, as the circumcision-free good news of Christ for Gentiles as first class citizens of the kingdom.<sup>32</sup>

When Paul's gospel is commended at the conclusion of this private meeting Paul emphasizes how the Pillars recognized the divine endorsement of Paul and the uniqueness of his mission in distinction to theirs, three times. In 2:7 Paul notes that "they saw that I was *entrusted* with the gospel to the uncircumcised just as Peter was to the circumcised" because (2:8) "*he who empowered* Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised also empowered me for my apostleship to the Gentiles." In his conclusion (2:9) Paul says a third time that "when James, Cephas, and John . . . recognized *the grace that had been given to me*, they gave . . . the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we

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<sup>31</sup>As T. D. Gordon correctly notes, "Justification by faith is affirmed in Galatians, but not as a new, distinctly Christian doctrine . . . Rather, it is affirmed as a doctrine which is as old as Abraham," ("The Problem at Galatia," *Interpretation* 41 [1987]: 41). That the discussion involves only the Gentile's relationship to the law and not of the place of the law in general is indicated by the multiple references to Gentiles and indeed the choice of Titus as the test case. If in fact, the topic of discussion was simply the end of the law for all people, then an eight-day old, Jewish male would have been a better test case. This is consistent with the spread of the gospel and the understanding of Jew / Gentile relations in the book of Acts where there is no question of Jewish fidelity to the law, but only a question of the necessary obligation of Gentiles (Acts 11, 15). As Longenecker states, "It was, however, distinctly Paul's gospel ("the gospel I preached to you" or "my gospel") because of his clear recognition of its law-free nature. It was, therefore, not his preaching of 'Christ crucified' that was being called into question by the Judaizers in Galatia, but the implications which Paul drew from that regarding God's acceptance of Gentile believers apart from their conformity to the Mosaic law," Longenecker, *Galatians*, 23.

<sup>32</sup>G. Howard notes as well, "Paul is not saying that he received nothing at all about the gospel from any man, for that would place him in conflict with his subsequent statement about being a persecutor of the church. He rather means that *the particular form of the gospel preached by him* was not given to him by other men. As he proceeds, it becomes clear that the particular form of the gospel which he has in mind is that form which distinguished his preaching from all others, that is, the non-circumcision gospel to the Gentiles. As to the rest of the gospel which was shared in common by all apostles and evangelists Paul has no reference at all," (*Paul: Crisis in Galatia: a Study in Early Christian Theology*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 35 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979], 53).

would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.”<sup>33</sup>

Paul’s gospel is clearly unique and worthy of something that has come only by revelation of Jesus Christ. If his gospel was simply defined in these chapters that Jesus was Messiah, or even salvation by grace through faith, one wonders why this would have ever differed from what Jesus and Peter had taught for the past fifteen years. The unique element herein described is clearly the mission to the Gentiles, *as Gentiles*, as equal heirs in the kingdom with Jewish brothers, a message which Paul heard first before any other person.<sup>34</sup> This reading also harmonizes well with the spread and development of the gospel in the Acts as well.<sup>35</sup>

#### Summary & Implications<sup>36</sup>

That Paul’s story is in some sense paradigmatic cannot be denied and does help prepare the Galatian audience for making the same choice for Christ versus Judaism that Paul made in his own life. But Paul’s life isn’t completely parallel to those of his audience simply because of his own spiritual heritage so that the ultimate personal example for the audience must be seen as Titus.

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<sup>33</sup>“In these parallel clauses, then, Paul in no way suggests that there are two gospels. There are, rather, two missions in which the one gospel is making its way into the whole of the cosmos,” Martyn, *Galatians*, 202. “Regarding Paul’s distance from the Jerusalem church, one may add with confidence that at the time of his call that church did not have a mission to Gentiles of any sort, whereas he knew his call to be focused exclusively on taking the gospel to Gentiles (2:7, 9)” Martyn, *Galatians*, 169, n. 212.

<sup>34</sup>This is a simple reading of Paul’s conversion story in Acts 9 before Peter’s witness of Cornelius’ reception of the spirit. The irony is that though Paul was the first person informed of the teaching, Peter was the first to publicize it. Peter’s full understanding of the law-free nature of the gospel for Gentiles may be questioned however, since his only experience in the book of Acts was with Cornelius who was described as a near proselyte, for whom the question of fidelity to the Law was in most major points already answered in the affirmative. Also Dunn who states that “It was precisely his understanding of his apostleship to Gentiles which he refused so resolutely to attribute to any human authority (v. 1)” Dunn, “The Relationship,” 465.

<sup>35</sup>Although after the conference in Jerusalem in Acts 11, the Jewish leadership recognize God’s work among the Gentiles, it does not appear that any of the Jerusalem apostles ever actively engaged in a Gentile mission, rather leaving that, in the providence of God, to Paul.

<sup>36</sup>The alleged charge from Paul’s opponents that “Paul got his message from Peter or Jerusalem” might be implied from Paul’s argumentation, but ultimately falters under its own weight. It is clear from 2:1-10 that while Jerusalem may have tolerated and even approved the Gentile mission, it did not originate with them, nor were they energized in any way to carry it out. The charge then would seem to be a non-charge and the reader is still in search of a rationale for Paul’s defense here. Even Longenecker seems to give in to this, saying “Why does Paul feel it necessary to make these statements of denial? Evidently, because the Judaizers in Galatia were asserting that he was really dependent on and subordinate to the Jerusalem apostles,” *Galatians*, 35. Two problems pertain, however: 1) he actually does submit to them so he does recognize their authority too but more importantly 2) I doubt that the Judaizers would suspect or accuse Paul that he got this unique Gentile gospel from Peter and James, when, in fact a) this might have legitimized the gospel, but more importantly b) Peter and James are getting it wrong from Paul’s perspective.

Clearly at this stage of Paul's missionary career he was not well-established in terms of his own personal reputation nor of his unique message. As Luke recounts the ascendancy of Paul above Barnabas during the first missionary journey it is easy to understand why many would question Paul's credentials and message. Although it is difficult to know for certain what charges Paul's opponents in Galatia were leveling against him, by paying careful attention to the nuances of Paul's argument we can try. Indeed it may be that one of the questions they were asking was "Paul where did you get this message and why has no one heard of it before." Paul's answer, of course, is that his gospel was given by direct revelation from God to him alone and no one else knew of it simply because he did not reveal it to anyone either immediately or clearly or even publicly. Over the course of chapters one and two the slow unfolding of the message of Paul's mission to Gentiles and the careful accounting of who did and did not know and when they found out would serve to answer this question of why Paul's gospel was a relatively new message and why those from Judea, both friend and foe, would not have heard.<sup>37</sup>

Paul's argumentation with reference to this question might be summarized as:

1. The gospel I preached came directly through a revelation from God, not from men and no one would have known of it apart from my testimony.
2. Before the call I was extremely zealous for non-messianic Judaism and I opposed those who believed Jesus is Messiah.
3. God called me through a personal revelation to ultimately take Christ to the Gentiles.
4. But I told no one, especially those in Jerusalem for at least three years.
5. When I finally did go to Jerusalem, I learned from Peter but did not reveal my unique mission to him.
6. The only aspect of my unique call which people in Jerusalem understood was that the former Messiah-rejector was now a Messiah-promoter.
7. Much later, nearly 14 years after this call, I did consult with the leaders of the faith and laid before them my unique Law-free mission to Gentiles, but even then this was a private meeting, the results of which were not published to those outside.
8. Then after my missional visit to Galatia I returned to Antioch where again, certain men from Judea, misunderstood the message and temporarily discouraged Peter from living out the truth of the gospel, that Gentiles were all one in Christ along with Jewish believers.

As Barclay has so well stated, "Paul does not tell his stories and *then* transmit their meaning: that meaning

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<sup>37</sup>This would apply to those presumably who understood the grace of God such as those Jewish believers in Christ in Judea who had only vaguely heard of Paul (1:21-24) and those who understood the grace of God, but with misdirected intentions such as the men from James who destabilized Peter's walk (2:11-14) or even the believing Pharisees who sought to impose law keeping on Gentiles after their conversion (Acts 15:5) and those who did not understand the grace of God such as Paul's opponents in Galatia (1:5-10) who seem to have had such a connection with Jerusalem. Paul's rhetoric and polemics against the current unbelieving character of much of Jerusalem (4:21-31) may indicate that the opponents somehow looked to Jerusalem.

is embodied in the shape of the stories themselves”<sup>38</sup> Perhaps the story of Galatians one and two is not simply about a defense of the gospel or even the example of the life changing power of the gospel, but about the sovereign timing of God who reveals his story to Paul, and through him sovererignly reveals the unfolding drama of redemption in his own time. So Paul where did you get this strange, new gospel that no one else has heard? From God alone and that’s why so many friends and foes have not heard of it before now.

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<sup>38</sup>Barclay, “Paul’s Story: Theology as Testimony,” 154.